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# INFORMATION CONVEYED BY THE MEDIA ON CHILDREARING IN FRANCE AND IN JAPAN : ANALYSIS OF FRENCH AND JAPANESE POPULAR MAGAZINES

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## Abstract

The press is a powerful medium of information that shapes and reflects parents' conceptions of child development. A comparison of Japanese and French magazines provides insight to current trends in childrearing and on their relative importance in each culture.

A comparison was made between similar types of magazines in France (" PARENTS ") and in Japan (" BABY-AGE ") based on twelve issues of each magazine (from November 1991 to October 1992). Classification of five topics (1 : who does the article refer to ?, 2 : who is the article addressed to ?, 3 : form of article (photo/text), 4 : subject-matter, 5 : authors of the article) was conducted on all articles and other texts except advertisements.

The results of the classification reveal that topics concerning " Food ", " Motor development ", " Learning of daily habits " and " Products conceived for infants " appeared more frequently in Japanese magazines, whereas " Psychology (psychoanalysis)" and " Society or Family " appeared more frequently in French magazines. There were no differences between the Japanese and French magazines concerning "Medical " topic category.

This analysis also reveals a predominance of physiological issues in Japanese magazines, whereas psychological issues are given more emphasis in French magazines.

Results of our previous comparative study (1991) concerning parental conceptions of child development and several characteristics of adult behavior in relation to infants were also found in these magazines. The relation between parental conceptions and information conveyed by the magazines is discussed.

**Key words :** magazine analysis, French-Japanese comparison, parental conceptions, child development.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Parents today, especially in developed countries, have access to much information on the ways and methods of child education. In addition to traditional sources such as their own family, parents rely on the media, scholars or doctors. How do mothers select their sources of information ? Shand and Kosawa (1984) have shown,

in relation to breast-feeding, that American and Japanese mothers use several sources at the same time. Furthermore, their results indicated that the media and specialized workshops were used in similar proportions as sources of information in the United States and in Japan. Can one expect similar data in relation to other aspects of child care and development?

The present study of magazines stems form a question posed in a previous work (Norimatsu, 1993). A previous comparative French-Japanese study on the learning of daily tasks concerning meals and toilet training has revealed a difference between the adults' statements (in surveys) and the actual facts as observed in the behavior of both children and adults. This study brought us to consider the origin of adult conceptions on child development: Are these perceptions conceived of individually or can they be attributed to information available to parents? If the latter is the case, we would expect to find parents' conceptions in the media.

Our present study focuses on specialized magazines instead of TV and radio since audio-visual media are not comparable in both countries. For instance, shows specifically addressed to young mothers are broadcast only in Japan. A high circulation of specialized magazines aimed at parents of young children in France and in Japan has lead us to consider this kind of press as more or less equivalent in both countries.

Until now, few studies have analyzed child development information in the media (Young, K. T. 1990). A comparison of French and Japanese magazines will enable us to understand the child care and education models which the media convey in each country. Similar types of magazines exist in both of these countries which are, furthermore, similar in terms of economic and industrial development.

## II. SELECTING THE MAGAZINES

Among the monthly magazines that deal with children, we selected two of them for this study.

In France, there are several magazines dealing with children among which two are exceptionally widespread: "*PARENTS MAGAZINE*" (337,000 issues monthly*1) and "*ENFANTS MAGAZINE*" (200,000 issues monthly*1). In France these magazines are aimed at future mothers and at parents with newly born or young children.

In Japan, there are more monthlies and they target their readers more precisely than in France: either future mothers, parents of newly born babies, or young children. There are four magazines for future mothers: 1) "*MATERNITY*", (since 1987), 2) "*BALOON*", (since 1987, 250,000 issuess/month*1), 3) "*P-and*", and 4) "*TAMAGO-CLUB*" (Eggs Club) (since 1993); and three magazines, for babies' parents, which are particularly widespread: 1) "*BABY-AGE*" (since 1970, 320,000 issues/month*1), 2) "*WATASHINO-AKACHAN*" (My baby) (since 1973, 350,000 issues/month*1), and 3) "*HIYOKO-CLUB*" (Chicks Club), (since 1993). In addition, there are other magazines for mothers with older children such as "*PETIT-ENFANT*" (1-4 years, since 1986) or "*COMO*" (schoolchild, 250,000 issues/month*1). The four magazines on maternity are quite similar, as are the three magazines "*BABY-AGE*", "*WATASHINO-AKACHAN*" and "*HIYOKO-CLUB*" for babies' parents.

TABLE 1
General presentation of magazines

| | FRANCE | JAPAN |
|---|---|---|
| Name of magazine | " PARENTS " | " BABY-AGE " |
| Editor | Hachette Filipacchi Presse | Fujin-Seikatsu-Sha |
| Year of creation | 1969 | 1970 |
| Circulation | 337,000/month | 320,000/month |

In the present analysis, we have chosen to compare the French magazine " *PARENTS* " with the Japanese " *BABY-AGE* " because the contents, date of creation and the circulation are roughly equivalent. Both magazines present some information on maternity, but are mainly concerned with caring for and educating babies.

The study uses 12 issues of each magazine from November 1991 to October 1992.

(*1): Circulation in 1990.

## III. METHOD

We have lead the analysis on two fronts: a statistical analysis (frequency of the tackled topics) and a content analysis. We mainly present in this article the results of the frequency analysis. This analysis allows us to know the frequency of the subjects dealt with in both magazines. The results will better enable us to understand the relative importance of the topics in each country.

### Classification

For the thematic analysis, we have selected five topics for classification: 1) " *Who* is the article about? " (fetus, children from 0 to 2 years, 3 year old and older, mother, father, parents, other adults), 2) " *To whom is the article addressed?* " (mother, father, parents, adults, grand-parents, child, family), 3) " *article format* " (picture or text), 4) " *article topic* " (medical, general care, food, motor development, cognitive development or education, learning of daily habits, psychology or psychoanalysis, products for children, leisure, maternity, society, contact, miscellaneous), 5) " *Who is the author of the article?* " (journalist, specialist (doctor, psychologist, etc.), reader or witness, others),

If two or more categories appear in the same article, they were all counted. Therefore, the sum of all categories does not necessarily amount to 100% but more, since the percentage of each category is calculated in relation to the total number of articles. In order to control the reliability of the data, two persons, one for each of two issues of the French magazines, checked the thematic classification. The reliability, according to this coding system, is between 80% and 83% for the main articles. This test has not been implemented yet on Japanese magazine.

The classification was applied to the whole magazine (everything mentioned in the table of contents) with the exception of advertising pages. The main articles were then analyzed separately. We took special care in analyzing the main articles which

deal with a different topic every month. Regular columns and articles appearing under the same title in each issue were excluded. Articles which only present fashion pictures, products, recipes without written text were also excluded. In this article we present mostly the results of the main articles.

## Ⅳ. RESULTS

### 1. Readership profile of each magazine

The readership profiles of these magazines is elaborated from information delivered by their editors. In both countries, more than 99% of the readers are women.

#### 1-a. *Reader's age*

There exists a very important difference between the two countries in relation to the age of the readers (see Table 2-a). The age of the French readers varies whereas 80% of Japanese readers are between 20 and 29 years old. In France, 16% of the readers are over 50. These women might be grandmothers.

TABLE 2-a
Age of readers

| Age | French | Japanese |
|---|---|---|
| 15 — 24 | 20 % | 29 % |
| 25 — 34 | 40 % | 69 % |
| 35 — 49 | 26 % | 0.4% |
| 50 or+ | 14 % | 0.5% |

TABLE 2-b
Number of children of readers

| Number of children | French | Japanese |
|---|---|---|
| 0 | 36 %* | 0.1% |
| 1 | 31 % | 85 % |
| 2 | 22 % | 13 % |
| 3 or+ | 11 % | 2.5% |

*The editor of French magazine estimates that the majority of readers without children are pregnant.

#### 1-b. *Number of children*

Mothers with a single child make up the large majority (85%) of the Japanese readers (see Table 2-b). According to the Office of Prime Minister of Japan (1991), 50% of the married population has two children and 23% 3 children. In France, however, the percentage of readers with 1, 2, 3 children or more is closer to the national statistic of the total French female population*[2]. The marked difference in women without children (probably pregnant women) can be explained by the fact that there are specialized magazines in Japan dealing with maternity. Japanese mothers with two and three children probably do not read this type of publication. In Japan, mothers with only one child do not yet have any experience in child-rearing and they mostly

read this type of publication. In France, among readers of this magazine, there is a wide range in their ages and in the number of their children.

(*2): According to a survey lead by CESP (1992) transmitted by the French editor.

1-c. *Matrimonial status of readers*

Among the French readers, 15% are single, 77% are married or cohabit, 3% are widows, and 5% are divorced. The question was not asked to Japanese readers, but when, in the questionnaire they were asked "family members living in the same household?", 99% of them answered "husband". Few couples live without being married in Japan. The percentage of married women (or women cohabiting) is higher among the French readers than among the total French population.

1-d. *Professional status and level of education of readers*

66% of the French readers work as opposed to 16% of the Japanese readers. However, 53% of Japanese women in the general population work(*3). Proportional to the whole population, many Japanese women who are inactive read the magazine while many active French women read it.

(*3): Figures are taken from a survey lead by the Japanese Service of General Affairs in 1989 on Japanese women with one or more children.

The statistics relating to the level of education of the readers are as follows: primary school: 14% of the French as opposed to 6% of the Japanese/secondary school: 31% (French) and 49% (Japanese)/university level: 22% (French) and 32% (Japanese among whom 22% have 2 years of college and 10% have 4 years of college)/ other technical-trade schools: 33% (French) to 13% (Japanese). These figures show that in both countries, in relation to the general population, women with a higher level of education read the mgazines more often.

2. Results of the thematic analysis

2-a. *General presentation of the magazines*

The Japanese magazine publishes on average two full reports or dossiers, every month, on important themes which are treated in the same manner as the main articles of the magazine itself. We have looked at these reports and the main article in the same way. For the Japanese magazine the study was conducted twice, with the dossier (DI: Including dossier) and without the dossier, but the results presented here are those including the dossiers.

The number of pages amount to an average of 150 pages in "PARENTS", and 299 pages (*DI) for "BABY-AGE". The percentage of pages dedicated to features and regular column (excluding advertising pages) is on average 54% in the French magazine and 57% (61%=*DI) in the Japanese magazine.

The number of articles and regular columns is on average 29 (F) and 34(J *DI). An article or a column covers on average 2.8 pages(F) and 5.4 pages(J). Proportional to the total number of pages, there are more short articles or culumns in the French magazine.

The number of main article in " PARENTS " is on average 8.9, with an average length of 4.6 pages per article; in " BABY-AGE ", we find 8.1(*DI) articles, with 10.7 pages per article.

(*DI): Including the dossier for the calculations in Japanese magazines.

2-b. *Results of the classification*

For each classification topic, we calculated the frequency of the appearance of each category in relation to the total number of articles (and columns as well, for the results concerning the whole magazine) each month, and then we calculated the average for the 12 issues in each country.

*Topic 1 : Who is the article about ?*

Since the descriptions in the artitle did not specify the ages of the children, in our classification we have taken into account the content of the article, with 7 categories: 1) Baby before birth, fetus, 2) Children between 0-2, 3) 3 years old and older, 4) Mother, 5) Father, 6) Parents, 7) other adults. We present the results of this classification of the main articles (see Fig. 1).

More than 80% of the Japanese articles deal with children between 0 and two years old while the French articles write about children of more diverse age. The difference can be explained by the fact that there are other specialized magazines on maternity or older children in Japan but not in France.

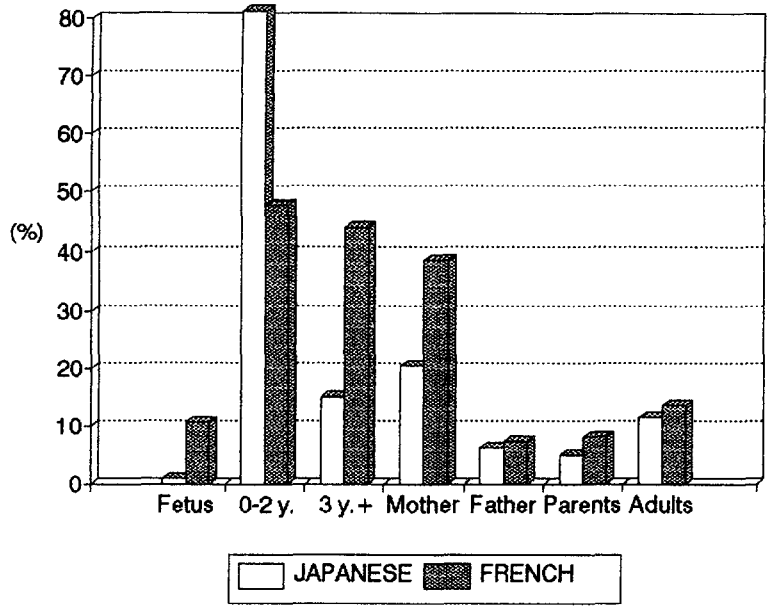


FIGURE 1 Results of topic 1: " Who does the article refer to? " on main articles. Frequency of appearance of each category in relation to the total number of main articles.

*Topic 2 : To whom is the article addressed ?*

This type is classified with the words used in the text of the articles. For example, the expressions " your husband " or " are you attentive parents ? " are considered as an address to the mother or to the parents. When such an expression, telling clearly to whom the text is addressed, is not used, we have classified it as " adult ".

We have noticed that the French articles are more often addressed to the parents compared to the Japanese articles which are more often geared to mothers or simply to adults. There are some French articles aimed at the grand-parents or at the family, while the Japanese articles are never addressed to them.

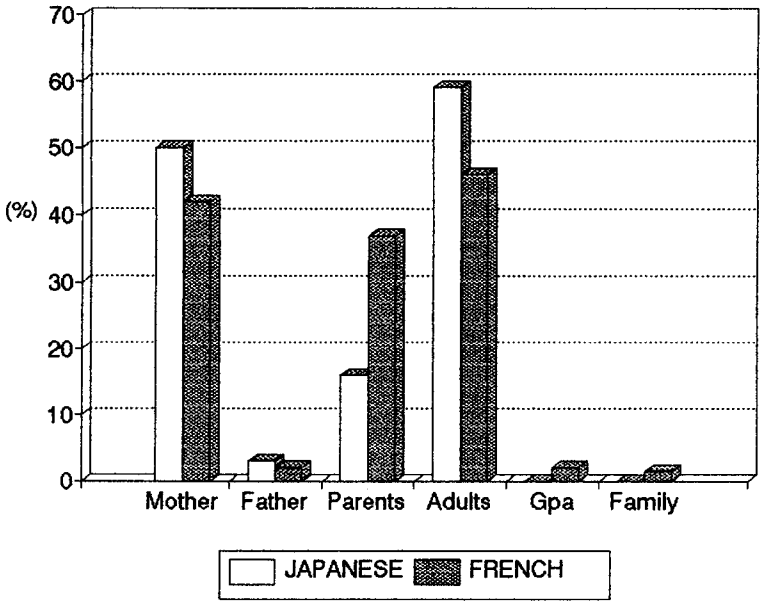


FIGURE 2 Results of topic 2 : " Who is the article addressed to ? " on main articles. Frequency of appearance of each category in relation to the total number of main articles.

*Topic 3 : Article format*

The point here is to calculate the percentage of images and texts. In total for all articles and columns, the Japanese magazine uses more images with 51% (50%*DI) as opposed to 44% in French magazine. However in the main articles, the result is reversed : 36%(40%*DI) in Japan and 48% in the French magazine.

*Topic 4 : Themes*

We calculate here the frequency of the specific subjects in relation to the number of total articles or columns. In a single article, two or more subjects can be discussed, and we have counted each subject each time. The percentage sum of all subjects is therefore over 100%.

The results of the frequency of subjects in the whole magazine are not always the same for the main articles (see Fig. 3-a and b).

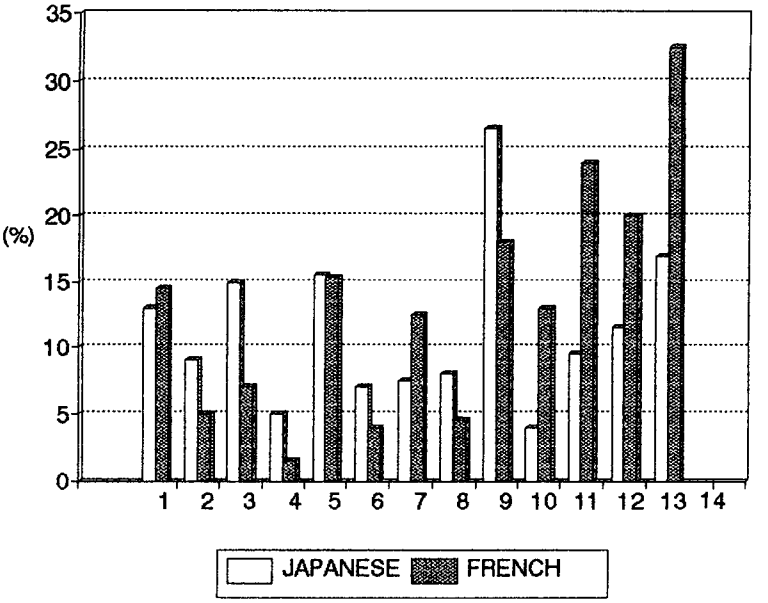


FIGURE 3-a Results of topic 4: "Subject-matter" on the totality of the magazines. Frequency of appearance of each category in relation to the total number of all articles and columns. (1: Medical, 2: General care, 3: Food, 4: Motor development, 5: Cognitive development or Education, 6: Daily habits, 7: Psychology, 8: Products for infants, 9: Leisure, 10: Pregnancy, 11: Society, 12: Contact, 13: Miscellaneous, 14: Cannot be classified).

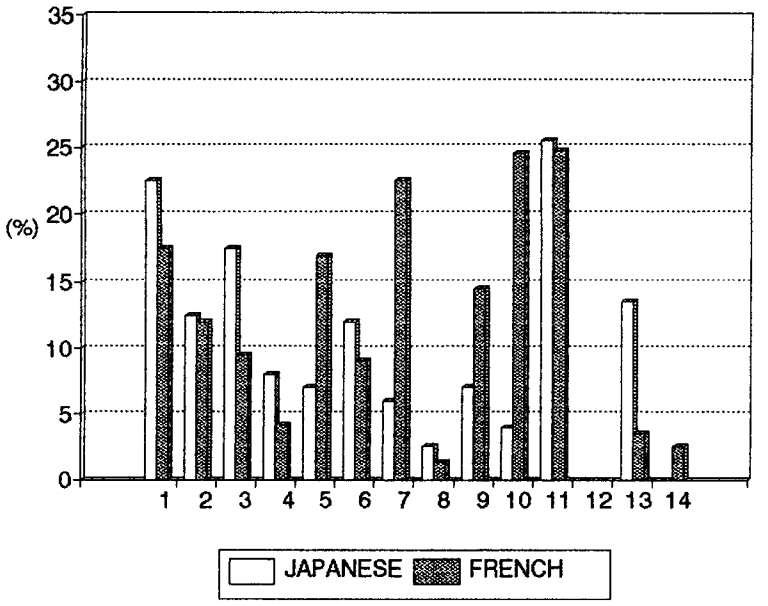


FIGURE 3-b Results of topic 4: "Subject-matter" on main articles. Frequency of appearance of each category in relation to the total number of main articles.

In the whole magazine, excluding advertising pages, the Japanese magazine deals more often with the following subjects: 2: general care, 3: food, 4: motor development, 6: daily habits, 8: products for children, 9: leisure. The French magazine treats more often of 7: psychology, 10: maternity, 11: society, 12: contact, 13: miscellaneous. There are few differences for 1: medical, and 5: cognitive developement or education. As for the main articles, the Japanese articles deal more often with: 1: medical, and still 3: food, 4: motor development, 6: products for children and 13: miscellaneous. The main French articles deal more often with: 5: cognitive development, 9: leisure, and still 7: psychology and 10: maternity.

*Topic 5 : Authors*

Noticeable differences appear between both countries (see Fig. 4). About 80% of the French texts are written by journalists both for the whole magazine and the main articles, while the Japanese journalists were involved in 40% of the texts. French journalists often use the explanations of specialists that they interview and quote examples from witnesses. In this case, journalists, specialists, and witnesses are all considered authors. On the other hand, many more Japanese articles are written on the question/answer mode: the reader questions the specialists and the journalists are not involved. As for the specialist, he/she usually write the text himself/herself. Finally, the percentage of specialists is slightly higher in the French magazine. However, over all, it seemed to us that quantitatively we read more explanations from specialists in the Japanese magazines, probably because of what we mentioned about how the specialists were involved in the articles.

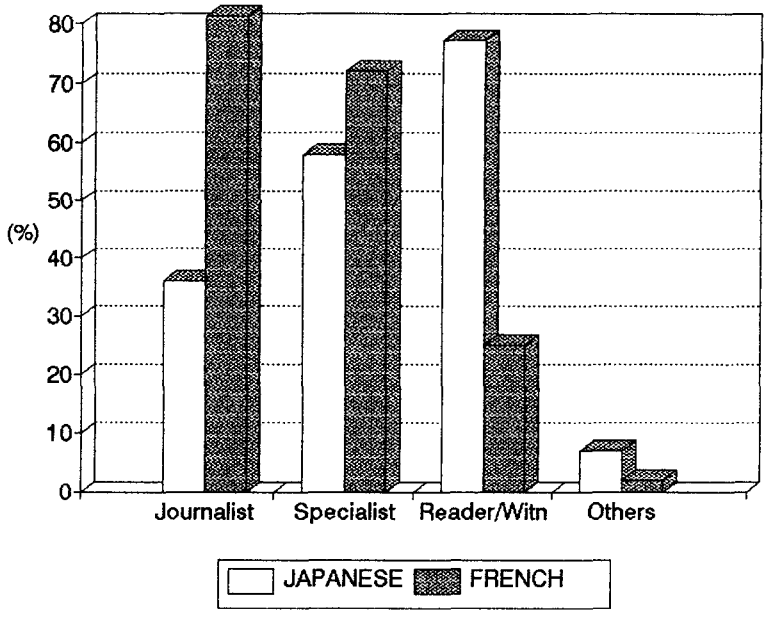


FIGURE 4 Results of topic 5: "Authors of the article" on main articles. Frequency of appearance of each category in relation to the total number of main articles.

The frequency percentage of readers and witnesses authoring articles is always higher in the Japanese magazine. In the main articles it reaches 77%.

## V. DISCUSSION

We summarize here the general remarks on the French and Japanese magazines. Certain particularities appear in both magazines, resulting from different society traits, which can play a role in communicating information to parents: 1) the person giving out information, 2) role models, 3) thematic frequency, and 4) the use of information.

### 1. Who is talking ?

In the French magazine, it is always the journalists who are the writers and it is difficult to know exactly which sentences or ideas expressed are the specialists'. On the contrary, in the Japanese magazines, the specialists write their text themselves more often and their interventions are often singled out. The proportion of specialists as authors is quite similar in both magazines (F : 40%, J : 34%). If we look at these specialists, they are: 1) doctors, (professors in medicine included) and 2) psychologists, therapists (professors in psychology included). We see that there are many more psychologists in French magazines. On the whole of 12 issues, there were 44% psychologists and 50% doctors in French magazine as compared to 23% psychologists and 75% doctors in the Japanese magazine. As already noticed in the thematic analysis, the subject " psychology " occurs more often in the French magazine. The high percentage of psychologist or psychoanalyst-authors in France stresses the importance of the subject.

### 2. Which role model ?

The persons serving as role models or examples are not treated in the same manner in both magazines. Who is the mother's model ? The models are often clearly identified in Japan while they remain anonymous in the French magazine.

In the Japanese articles, the testimonies are almost always identified and the pictures which illustrate the articles are pictures of " real children and parents " (not professional models). Pictures from daily life in ordinary homes appear often. In fact, these witnesses are readers who answer classified ads published in the magazine asking for examples. Kakinuma (1995) made the same remarks in her analysis of Japanese and American magazines; the patricipation of readers in the Japanese magazine was much higher.

On the contrary, in the French magazine, mothers who are quoted are only mentioned through their first name and are impossible to identify. Furthermore, many mothers, children and fathers' pictures are of professional models.

Is the importance of the witnesses=readers in Japan linked to a sensitivity to what others are doing? Do Japanese mothers feel safer with examples of ordinary persons " like them " ? This approach is contrary to the French magazine that seems to prefer idealization. The baby and adult models correspond to physical criteria that are more idealistic than real.

### 3. Thematic frequency

3-a. *Importance of the physical in Japan and the psychological in France.*

The results of the thematic analysis show that the subjects linked to physical characteristics such as motor development or food are discussed more often in the Japanese magazines whereas the French magazines deal more frequently with psychological topics. This observation confirms the results of our French-Japanese comparative study (Norimatsu, 1991) whereas Japanese adults are more insistent than the French in regard to food. It is important for them that the child eat all that the adults give him/her in order to have a balanced diet. In toilet training, Japanese adults use a " physical strategy " such as monitoring the frequency of urination, the use of cotton or training diapers so that the child feels the humidity of the urine, whereas the French adults use a " verbal strategy ", explaining to the child what must be done concerning toilet training.

3-b. *Conception of the life of children*

Furthermore, the French magazine deals more often with social subjects. Themes are often presented on a social level and even sometimes on an international level. In Japan, the subject remains on an individual, family or mother-child level. In the French magazine, contacts of help associations and groups, as well as legal information concerning the treated subjects, are often mentioned. A regular column entitled " your rights " presents each month legal information concerning parents and family life. In other areas of the magazine, information on demonstrations, calls for help or participation (for sick children for example) or emergency numbers are given. This type of information rarely appears in the Japanese magazine. This difference reveals something of the conception of young children and family in both societies. The French place the child's life and especially the protection of his or her rights on a societal level, whereas in Japan these matters are more individual or family-oriented.

3-c. *Father's place in each society*

The relationship between " father-mother-child " is conceived of differently in both countries. The magazines from both countries use father as a topic with the same frequency (J=6%, F=7% of the main articles mentioning the father). However, the way in which the father is discussed is different: in the French magazine, examples are: " daddy jealous of baby ", " changes in a couple's life when the child arrives ", " life when you are three " ; whereas in Japan, the father is mentioned in relation to his participation in the baby's care. In France, the father is mentioned as the mother's mate or as an element in the couple, especially when the subject discussed is the changes in the couple's relationship after the baby's birth, the father in relation to the child, and lives of parents and children. In Japan, the " father " is the " child's father " and his role is to participate in the child's care. The father is seldom mentioned as the mother's partner (only one time, the notion of " couple father -mother " is mentioned in the " White book of the parents' life "). Furthermore, in the French magazine, there is a " couple " column for professional advice on the couple's issues (each month since January 1992), whereas in the Japanese magazine, there is a

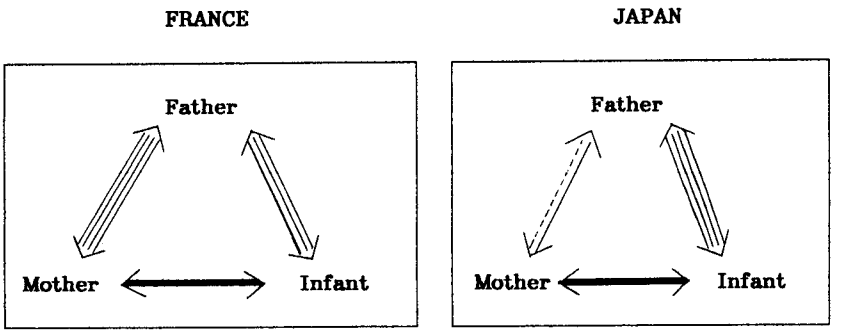


FIGURE 5 Model of Father-Mother-Infant relations

*The mother-infant relation isn't accounted for in this model because of it's predominance in both countries. Data on father-infant and father-mother relations come from articles and columns related to the " father ".

monthly column " father " presenting letters from father readers discussing their experience with their child and an other column " mother's room " where mother readers talk about the baby's birth.

Statistically, we can summarize the interests' centers concerning family ties in the following manner (see Fig. 5) :

This difference corresponds with the patterns presented by Vogel (1963) in the western world : on one side there are the parents (father/mother) and on the other side, the children. In Japan, on one side there are the mother and child, on the other side the father. In general, western society puts more emphasis on the couple's life whereas in Japan as soon as the child is born, he or she is placed at the center of the family. In the media these differences are clearly expressed when discussing the child and the father's position in each country. This kind of relationship, however, may evolve in the future.

### 4. Knowledge and use of knowledge

We have described how many of the explanations came from specialists. Their point of view is similar in both magazines concerning the theme of " breast-feeding and toilet training " which we have analyzed. However, if they agree on the " technical " side, it appears that technically the opinions are subtlely different in the two societies.

For example, pediatricians from both countries talk about the spectacular progress of artificial milk and the high quality of maternal milk (due to natural antibodies) in the same manner. However, Japanese articles consider artificial milk as a substitute while the French specialists place it at the same level ; mothers can choose " what's best for them ". In Japan, there is a " normal way " (breast feeding). The majority of the mothers eventually choose this method. There is a widespread belief that " a baby who drinks artificial milk will become fat, lack intelligence, be weak and at last will encounter difficulties in school ".

This example shows that even scientific information does not necessarily have the same impact in different cultures. The implementation and interpretation of science is

influenced by traditional beliefs and morals. In one place, the object becomes a substitute when in need; in the other, it is an alternative.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The present comparative study of the French and Japanese magazines reveals a strong presence of certain themes which we had already noticed in the survey and observation of our previous study (1991).

The norms of child development, whether the French and Japanese parents in our survey share them or not, can be found in the magazines. The only exception is the specialist's explanation concerning toilet training. They tend to avoid indicating learning ages, and remain ambivalent in regards to parents' conceptions. Overall, parents' conceptions on child development were usually, found in the magazines.

Furthermore, characteristics of the adult's behavior in relation to the child observed in our previous soudy are repeated in the results of the magazine analysis. These characteristics are for France: emphasis on a psychological or cognitive (verbal) approach, and for Japan: emphasis on a physical approach (motor development or food).

We have put into light a strong parallel between parental conceptions of child development and the information conveyed by the magazines in both countries. In addition, the social or cultural characteristics of each country is mirrored in the magazine. We are thus tempted to believe that the parents take into account outside information to form their opinions, and among the outside influence is the media. Still, it is difficult to measure the level of influence of the magazines on the parents' conceptions. In order to pursue our research we have introduced in the questionnaire of a current work a series of questions on the mother's information sources and their use.

**Note:** Part of this study was presented at the XIII th Biennial Meeting of ISSBD in Amsterdam, June 28-July 2nd 1994.

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